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## Added Value Food

*Co-created myth, art and magic in small-scale food production*

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## Abstract

Added Value Food: Co-created myth, art and magic in small-scale food production

Food has an incredible ability to convey meaning. In the new food economy, creating value added products with appropriately charged meanings is an increasingly complex and risky business. However, there are food manufacturers that seemingly have an uncomplicated and successful ability to value add their products: Small-scale farming Producers.

Utilising cultural analysis and ethnography as an approach, this thesis explores the value adding practices of these small-scale Producers, with a focus on how authenticity is infused in their food products. What is it that they can reveal about the creation of value added food? How do they define and what do they do to add authenticity? How is this meaning infused in their food products?

This research reveals small-scale Producers engage in acts of co-created myth with consumers, create spaces that resemble art galleries to sell their products, and engage magic to infuse authenticity. These practices, while embedding desired class position, also reveals the thin line between magic and trickery, the limits of over-reliance on consumer feedback, and raises questions about the future viability of business practices in an evolving food landscape. This thesis calls for small-scale farming Producers to review and evolve their position within the wider food industry and in so doing, develop a collaborative voice as cultural mediators in the New Food Economy.

Keywords: Value Adding, Food, New Economy, Experience Economy, Co-creation, Mythology, Magic.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Definition and Objective

This thesis investigates the practice of value adding in food production, by taking a view from a food manufacturer that has found itself in recent years increasingly integrated into the food industry: small-scale farming Producers<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, their construction and practice of value adding ‘authenticity’ to food products is revealed.

The objective of this thesis is twofold. One is to study the process of and provide a new perspective on value adding, with an emphasis towards ‘authenticity’ in food. This examination delivers new knowledge and provides future direction to small scale farming Producers and the wider food industry. The secondary objective is to provide a demonstration to the value of Applied Cultural Analysis in use.

### 1.2 Introduction

The central theme of this thesis addresses the concern of value adding authenticity in food – and in so doing, takes us on a journey of why and how this value is constructed, discovers unexpected values in practices, and outlines the value of a cultural analytical approach to value creation.

To begin, a simplistic starting view of adding value within a food brings with it straightforward notions of ‘adding’ to raw ingredients and processing them in a way that increases economic return. A useful supporting definition of this starting view to ‘value added’ is provided by the United States Department of Commerce and Industry, which outlines any processing of food as a value added act in and of itself:

Processed foods are “value-added” products, referring to the fact that a raw commodity or commodities are transformed into a processed product through use of materials, labour, and technology. Any product that requires some degree of processing is referred to as a processed product, regardless of whether the amount of processing is minor, such as for canned fruit, or more complex, such as for snack foods (2008; p. 3)

However, the processing of food is not as straightforward as gathering materials, labour and technology together equals automatically producing a value added, authentic product. Of course food products require a material basis. However, the addition of *culture* as a value add, the “inscription of meanings and associations as they are produced and circulated in a conscious attempt to generate desire for them amongst end users” (DuGay & Friedmann, 2002, p. 7) is an evident phenomenon in the food market today that introduces an element of complexity and requires deeper investigation and further definition. Authenticity in particular, is not a new development in the food industry. Interestingly, the introduction of these types of products became evident in the market 40 years ago, and continues today with increasing importance. Several large industry consultant groups refer to the importance of value adding, with statements such as:

Key trends to impact the food and beverage market through 2012 and beyond... relate to purity, authenticity and sustainability, as consumers continue to look for products with added value. (Innova Market Insights, 2011)

Added value still matters. Despite lingering economic uncertainty and mounting scrutiny of product health claims, consumers remain willing to spend a bit more on food that does, or stands for, ‘something’. (Euromonitor International, 2010)

Major multinational companies with large research and development budgets also have a record of creating ranges that point to ‘authentic’ as a key element of a value added product offer. These ranges include products in nearly all food categories, from dairy to liquor, condiments, snack foods, cereals, breads, sauces, frozen, ready meals and pasta. A selection of these types of products is shown below:



Figure 1.0 Examples of ‘Authentic’ Food Products by large manufacturers

From left: Nestlé’s ‘Real Dairy’ (2012) authentic ice cream and frozen yogurt range, ‘made with simple ingredients, done right’; Barilla’s (2012) ‘Academia Barilla’ range,

an ‘authentic Italian collection including rare regional extra virgin olive oils, tasty sauces and pesto, delicious green olives, an herbaceous herb mix and creamy cheese spreads’; and Hellman’s (2012) (a brand owned by Unilever) range of Aioli with ‘extraordinary flavour inspired by authentic culinary traditions’.

Given the ongoing involvement and importance of value adding authenticity in food by these large companies, it is surprising that small-scale food Producers were not run out of the industry long ago. Instead, these Producers find themselves in a strong and growing position within the food market for value added authenticity. For example, direct to consumer sales from small scale farming production have grown 104.7% from 1997 to 2007 (Martinez, 2010), and 60% of the Swedish population prefers to buy local produce (Ekelund, Fernqvist & Tjárnemo, 2007, p. 233). How did this happen? What are these small-scale producers doing to promote and embed this position?

This thesis strives to offer a new perspective to the creation of authentic value added food products. To do so, the practices of small-scale Producers will be explored. This group has been integrated into the food market, often in the absence of deliberate strategizing on behalf of the Producers themselves. When prompted to describe their products, these Producers spoke about ‘Authenticity’ and characterised with the use of references such as ‘artisan’, ‘home-made’, ‘hand-made’, and tied it very much an emotional state - a feeling - that one has. How did Producers come to construct their perception of Authenticity? Why is emotion so important? How is this emotion produced?

Involving producers that are seemingly practicing what they already know, and are successfully meeting consumer demand with their approach, this investigation will uncover how and what is value added by small scale Producers: in the values they infuse in their food commodities, of the value found in their way of life, and the value in their production practices. It is an examination of the small, unconscious acts revealed through ethnographic enquiry and the lens of cultural theory to reveal the practice of value adding ‘authenticity’ as a culturally constructed act. These findings will be demonstrated as important not only for Producers in understanding their practices, but also for the wider food industry concerned with value adding authenticity in their food products, “through 2012 and beyond” (Innova Market Insights, 2011).



### 1.3 Value Adding

Prior to my undertaking a Master degree in Applied Cultural Analysis, I worked in the food industry for over ten years. Given that I also hold a business degree in marketing, the roles that I held were within marketing and also sales departments for some of the largest multinational food companies on the world. It was here that I became involved in value adding - sometimes referred to as 'new product development / innovation' or 're-positioning / re-branding' - but whatever the terminology, the desired outcome of value adding was always the same: sell more product, more often, to more people, to make more money. What struck me after a few years, two countries and four different multinational companies later, was that regardless of category or company (I worked across dairy, ice cream, snack foods and liquor categories, for companies that held wide representation across most of the categories found in a supermarket, and also in restaurants and cafés through the Foodservice trade), was the consistency of conversation regarding value adding. The earlier quotes from Innova and Euromonitor, has in my experience, been repeating for over ten years.

Value adding was something that had to be done, even in the absence of falling sales or other signs of imminent failure of a product, and was viewed as standard business practice. I attended endless meetings and conferences to discuss how a product could be value added. But in that experience - and co-incidentally, in the attainment of my marketing degree - the question that was never asked was: What *is* value adding? Here I investigate from a cultural and social sciences perspective to help move the conversation forward.

Value adding could be seen as the reinvention of product for economic gain. But what is the reinvention happening - what are the processes at play? Let's continue with the idea of processing as value adding in food as mentioned in the Introduction. This processing of a raw commodity to product can also be described as a process of cooking. But is cooking value adding? An act of combining raw ingredients and heating is value adding? Perhaps, with an expansion on this perspective from Levi-Strauss (1994), who wrote about the processes of cooking and described it as an "...act of mediation, where we transform raw materials into a cooked product... not only does cooking mark the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes" (p. 164-5).

Focusing on the words of mediation, transformation and culture, cooking can be viewed as a process to *mediate* what and how is added in, or transited out; to *transform* into a final product is a practice to inscribe *cultural* meaning to the human state. Using the previous product

examples, Nestlé' has proposed they've transited out 'complex' ingredients and brought in simple ones. Barilla removes the common and adds rarity. Hellerman's adds inspiration and tradition. It's the selection of these elements that positions the function of the cook (or food manufacturer) as a *mediator* at the conjunction of final product to the consumer and therefore places them in the position of cultural agent(s). Culture becomes an important part of the production in cooking - the combination of what cultural meaning and associations are selected and represented in this transformation *is* the challenge in 'cooking' and thus the 'value add'. Cultural processing and processes bind the selection of chosen elements that can be simplicity, rarity and tradition. Therefore to produce a 'value added' food product, an understanding of cultural processes is required – a complex task in which the food industry finds itself involved.

That's not to say that the food industry is not trying. There is certainly a great deal of mediation and transformation happening today. According to Mintel (2011), an astonishing 20,000 new "value added" products per month are launched in the global food industry. However, a demonstration of the complexity involved with cultural interpretation, and just how challenging creating a cultural product can be, is found in the exceptionally high failure rate, "exceeding 90 per cent for some categories, which suggests that firms have difficulty in developing products that appeal to enough people to warrant continued distribution" (Connor & Schiek, 1997).

Combined, this has created a food industry both focused on creating new added-value products while at the same time, working to minimise the potential risk of failure and subsequent economic loss. The sheer number of products also hints to the increasing complexity of adding value to products by the inscription of cultural values. These cultural values often take the form of ideologies, experiences, morals, mythology, magic and sometimes illusion infused within the product offer and branding, such as Coca Cola's inscription to transform a carbonated soft drink to the embodiment of the spirit and essence of America, summarised in their advertising plans:

Coke is real, authentic, honest, passionate and refreshing. It taught us to sing in perfect harmony. It even introduced us to Santa Claus. Coke is the kind of cultural fabric that unites all of us in some way. It has always encouraged us to share who we are and what we believe in (Identity Advertising, 2007, p. 2).

This inclusion of value adding culture in products brings food closer to commodities that are appraised by consumers by means other than strictly sensory terms (in the sense of sweet, sour, salty, bitter and umami) - they are also cultural assessments. Pierre Bourdieu provides us with a definition of how these additional assessments of taste may be undertaken with his work

*“Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste”* (1984), outlining that one’s taste is internalized at a very young age and therefore subconscious. Assessment and reaction of taste is consequently not as much a cognitive, aware thought - a phenomenon that Bourdieu named ‘Habitus’ - but rather an unconscious, emotional response. Hence the emphasis on emotion in description of authenticity by Producers in this study.

The creation of ‘value added’ inscribed in food is thus an effort to elicit emotion from consumers and entice them to spend more money in return for feeling this emotion. Value adding is a basis for economic gain via emotion, and it is emotion that becomes critical in the evaluation of how successful a value add food product is. It is also one of the more difficult to interpret – as emotions are linked to habitus, which is “below the level of consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1984), one cannot simply walk up to a consumer and ask what their emotions regarding a certain product are – they would not be able to tell you. It leaves mediators (cooks) charged with the responsibility to decode cultural meaning and charge their products with it by their practices. It also leaves the assessment of their labours as ephemeral and complex. It is information that needs to be teased out, tantalisingly revealed and then hidden, uncovered by other means - lending qualitative research methods such as ethnology and anthropology as critical in the understanding and evaluation of value added food.

For the food industry, the tension created between potential and seemingly boundless creative transformative opportunity available in developing ‘new’ value added products is balanced against the underlying understanding of risk in both the emotive assessment of the culture that is infused and also in economic terms has led to, as Belasco (1989, p. 210) states, “corporate conservatism”, neatly outlining a response from the food industry to address both perceived risks: there has been increased focus to consumer-directed research, in some instances as broadly to elevate its importance into the heart of day to day business operations, while at the same time to reduce the costs in bringing a product to market. The emergence of qualitative research methods to uncover ‘insight’ in the food industry saw an increasing investment to understanding food consumption within a daily life context when developing value added products. This however, is a difficult task when we consider the unconsciousness of taste and how unaware we can be about the food we eat on a daily basis. Indeed, food is often an aspect of life that has seemingly been absorbed quietly into the background, as eloquently stated by Edward East in 1914:

Today one sits down to breakfast, spreads out a napkin of Irish linen, opens the meal with a banana from central America, follows with cereal of Minnesota sweetened with the product of Cuban cane, and ends with a Montana lamb

chop and a cup of Brazilian coffee. Our daily life is a trip around the world, yet the wonder of it gives us not a single thrill. We are oblivious. (As quoted in Belasco & Scranton, 2002, p.9)

The environment in which we eat our meals also demonstrates the quiet absorption of food into the background of daily life. In a 2011 report, it was suggested that in an average person's day, 56% of the time spent eating (85 of 152 total minutes) is while engaged in another activity considered primary such as watching television, driving, preparing meals, or working (Hamrick, 2011, p. 5). We're not even paying full attention to over half the food that goes in our mouths, yet significant amounts of time and money are invested by large food manufacturers trying to get consumers to tell them why they eat what they do.

The complexity in dissecting everyday life within business constraints such as timelines / budgets in a climate of conservatism and cost reduction has conceivably led to an avoidance of radically innovative products. Nestlé, the world's largest food and beverage manufacturer, clearly reflects this industry focus in their 2011 Annual report, stating:

Nestlé's product and brand portfolio ranges from global icons to local favourites. It is supported by an unmatched research and development capability, with clear priorities, focused on driving innovation and renovation that is relevant and attractive for consumers (p. 15).

As will be revealed over the coming chapters, the reduction of economic risk by bringing down costs in value adding is also demonstrated with the use of materials (such as synthetic / non-food additives, flavour enhancers, thickeners, colours, stabilizers), a change in business operations such as off shore manufacturing, combined actions of which have increased the length and complexity of the food chain and the distance – both geographical and mental - between the raw and the cooked.

It is this distance created over the past 50 years that's had a hand in creating the demand for authentic products and places small-scale production in the position it finds itself today, and is a key point over the coming pages, when theoretical traditions are discussed.

## 2. Approach

Developing a deeper understanding the practices of value adding undertaken by Producers unfolds over the coming chapters. Firstly, a description of how the inspiration for this topic of study came about through my involvement in the Skåne Food Innovation Network entitled Background. In the Theoretical Framework section, foundational knowledge about the tools in use for this cultural analysis and ethnological investigation will be made with a review of food and cultural studies traditions and the cultural meaning in food with specific attention to the demand for products ‘value-added’ with healthy, authentic, home/hand-made, ‘return to the farm’ inscriptions. Food-as-background in our lives initially lead it to become a relative latecomer to cultural analysis (Jönsson, 2005 p.105), however it is finding increasing importance within the social science traditions. With the high level of unconsciousness that we can have about our food, how did food value added with authenticity become positioned in the marketplace? This path to ‘value adding’ was a long journey, requiring global political, economic and cultural forces. Small-scale farming producers are experiencing a relatively recent resurgence, and in order to illustrate how these producers have become integrated within the food market, and the importance of their role will be addressed using Food Regimes as an organising concept. Exploring the counter culture that has become part of the mainstream food system continues this discussion, and outlines the basis of consumer demand for authentic, value added food.

This foundational knowledge will demonstrate the importance of a perspective from exploring the practices of small-scale farming Producers, and fully identify it as an important field of study. To follow, a description of the empirical research undertaken for this study is presented with a methods and materials section. In Findings, the three key themes of co-created myth, art and magic that reveal how Producers value-add authenticity to their food products is discussed. A critical summary discussion of implications and limitations of these practices follows leading to concluding summary, application of findings, and recommended future research, which concludes the thesis.

## 3. Background

This thesis was borne from a related study I undertook for the Skåne Food Innovation Network (SFIN), where the empirical material in use here has also been applied specifically to the immediate application within the relatively narrow SFIN business context and need. That

investigation did however reveal deeper structures at play regarding the creation of value and can be credited with sparking the idea for the wider value added theme here. A short review of SFIN and the project's reason for being will provide a useful understanding of the context that formed the basis of this study.

SFIN is described on its home web page as 'a gathering power for everyone who wants to develop Skåne into a food central for Europe', with members and partners representing a range of business, from manufacturing companies, retail organizations, public authorities, local farming producers to universities and colleges. A review of current membership and partnership listing reveals 70+ businesses across broad areas of interest –from Lund University and food giants Nestlé and Procordia, to consultants PWC, packaging with Tetra Pak, Retail groups, and also small independent stores such as Möllen Ost. SFIN is a knowledge based network organisation, that is – it does not manufacture goods but rather promotes and acts as an interface for the open exchange of ideas that produce innovation for the food industry with members and partners. The organisation is positioned as a expert-facilitator between these different areas of the food industry, achieved by bringing actors together via a membership requirement and participation in the services and activities that SFIN provides such as access to networks, seminars, courses, theme days, education forums, and public opinion surveys. As such, the organisational structure and ongoing activities at SFIN afforded an opportunity for me to participate and view food in a context that combined all actors across the food industry, from an objective and encompassing standpoint. Access across this broad network allowed me to understand and frame the challenge of value adding for the food industry, see how different actors approach it, and provided an excellent arena to begin empirical research to value adding.

SFIN has strong Industry links, and operates several strategic project groups as discrete business units titled: 'Co-operation and Strategies', 'Innovation and Entrepreneurship', 'Recruitment', 'Tomorrow's Meal Services' and 'Taste Skåne'. The sub networks created include a 'CEO network', 'Research Network', 'Retailer Network', 'Entrepreneur Council' and 'Student Recruitment Program' (Annual Report, 2010).

'Taste Skåne' is the discrete business unit where the initial project took place. The key strategic intent for the division is to promote Skåne food and culture via four identified pillars of Visibility, Availability, Quality and Co-operation. Taste Skåne also has one of the more complex communication challenges for SFIN, with one of the most diverse range of stakeholders – from small local producers to large retail organisations such as ICA (one of Sweden's largest supermarket chains with 1,349 stores as at December 2011 (ICA, 2011)). The main focus areas for the division are 'Culinary Tourism', 'Taste Skåne', and facilitation of the Retailer Network and

Producer Network. My key involvement was a new project born as a result of collaboration of 'Taste Skåne' with the 'Retailer Network' where an opportunity to increase distribution of local produce to meet identified consumer demand for small-scale products was launched: the 'Locally Produced and Carefully Selected' project. The primary objective of the projects was to bring the local Skåne products that retailers had identified through feedback from their customers as in demand to 'within arms reach' of these consumers. However, the project was facing difficulties due to low participation rates from Skåne Producers. SFIN identified that greater knowledge about local producers was required to encourage their integration with other food chain actors, and marked my entry to the business.

In order to encourage their greater participation, the objective of this initial study focused to developing communication messages to Producers. The content of messages were developed by the insight I gained regarding producer attitudes and values. Specific attention was paid to how an understanding of attitudes and values could assist in the development of Business Relationships, Display Concept, Distribution and Future Planning for SPS and its Retailer Network.

The findings for SFIN hinted strongly at practices Producers undertake that 'add value' as central to their business operations. With my interest piqued, a need for a deeper analysis from the one undertaken for SFIN was highlighted. The findings from the initial study have been incorporated to this thesis and provided a strong basis to develop understanding of the construction and practices of value adding authenticity.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1 Food and Cultural Studies Traditions**

In order to provide a full appreciation of the cultural processes involved in value adding, a historical view to how existing food studies add to the understanding of consumer consumption of 'authentic' develops a framework for later discussion. There is a long tradition in cultural and sociological food studies regarding the *consumption* or *meaning of food* and does provide a basis for understanding a consumer perspective, and offers an understanding of how demand is created. Existing food studies credit food consumption for a vast array of cultural process from the reproduction of a stable society (Lupton, 1996; Goody, 1982), the decoder of the unconscious attitudes of a society (Levi Strauss, 1994), of nationality (Barthes, 1967), as an indicator of class (Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984), social significance (what is important in a given society) (Douglas, 1982), to the relation of food in feminist studies

and body shape (Adams, 1990). Taken together, these studies point to food as central to culture, a suitably broad implication that requires narrowing.

In narrowing to the central theme of authenticity in this thesis, the central ideas that emerge from a consumer perspective is that consumption of small-scale, authentic food is enjoyed largely by the elite upper classes in westernised societies – the diets of the poor have remained relatively unchanged: they are excluded from this possibility (Bourdieu, 1994). However, Alan Warde (1997) argues that the emphasis is shifting from class formation towards the formation of new groups in society that share ‘lifestyle’ rather than social class, and the consumption of ‘authentic’ food is a representation of chosen lifestyle group. A study by Anthony Giddens (1991) takes a wider view, outlining that the agency of consumers is emphasised over both the social and economic structures in which they find themselves, and this is a crucial means of establishing an individual’s identity. The emergence of consumption of small-scale authentic food is also evidently associated with the mitigation of food risk and potential for disease as explored by Ulrich Beck (1992) and Mary Douglas (1996, p. 123).

Further, in specific regard to the term of authenticity, a concrete definition is a little difficult to locate. It has been described as a product of shared systems of signification (Ashley et al, 2004, p. 7) and is a modern phenomenon (Appadurai, 1986). What constitutes as ‘authentic’ changes over time (Peterson, 1997), an example of which is exemplified with the shift in lard heavy foods recipes - such as Cassoulet - where goose fat may be substituted for cheaper and lighter alternative fat sources but still acceptably remains an authentic French dish.

In some cases, authenticity has been deciphered as an act of micro-resistance to dominant forms of cultural production (De Certeau, M; Giard, L & Mayol. P, 1998) - where one makes an appeal for authenticity in response to their perception of *inauthenticity* in others. For example, you are what you *don't* eat. Josée Johnston & Shydon Baumann (2010, p. 70) provide a key view on authenticity with their claim that it “doesn’t really exist” as it is socially constructed. The definitions of authenticity are difficult to define concretely and are deliberately vague in use here, as it is the cultural construction through practice that this thesis aims to reveal.

It’s important to note that the term of ‘consumer’ can be applied to Producers in this chapter, also - after all, as we all are when it comes to food - the small-scale producers in this study are consumers, too. There is argument that Producers are developing products they personally consume, and this discussion becomes an important aspect to continue building on Bourdieu’s habitus theory from the Introduction. As unconscious dispositions of the mind, structured and acquired through activities, experiences, class and collective history, Habitus is of particular recall before commencing on this historical view of value adding in the food industry, and requires that



the Producers participating in this study be positioned. It's their unconscious knowledge held in habitus that is a key element in leading Producers to find themselves as value adding success stories, mediating and transforming products that they themselves consider 'tasteful'.

Class as an indicator to subconscious taste assessment is a key concept for investigation here, as it is this that Bourdieu drew his theory of taste. While Bourdieu addressed taste in a wide variety of concerns - home decorating, art and desirable qualities in men (for professional jobs) - taste in food "was a focal point in the analysis, because it is inculcated so early in life. He argued that food becomes a moral issue... and is intricately connected to the body - in that it is taken into the body and also "makes" particular body forms appropriate to social classes" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p.111), the latter of which is evident in current obesity rates of the lower and working classes in Westernised nations. Building on the previous assertion that small scale Producers are mediating and transforming products that they themselves consider 'tasteful' and catering mainly for the elite upper classes - to play directly on this wording, it must also mean that they are situated in the elite upper classes, and are therefore value adding to their own habituated middle to elite upper class taste assessments. Are they? To clarify, a determination of 'upper class' is made with a theoretical view to position Producers in this study before moving to a discussion of the New Food Economy and Food Regimes.

To do so, I again bring in Bourdieu (1984) to assist in revealing the social positioning and power of Producers using his description of cultural capital, which provides a clue to the culturally developed taste assessments at work here. Cultural capital refers to the accumulation of non-financial assets that elevates class position by their communication and exchange for power and status. These types of exchange items are knowledge, education and skills that a given society values - such as higher education degrees, artistic talent, and sporting achievements. As will be demonstrated in the coming description of Food Regimes, small-scale Farming Producers do possess skills that the upper elite classes value at this point in time. It is the possession of this knowledge that positions them in the elite upper classes, a positioning of which is communicated and enforced via production and sale of their products. One Producer, during a discussion around competitiveness regarding marmalades on the market, showed an understanding of the cultural capital that they possess:

I can compete... I have better products, cleaner taste, but they cannot compete with me. Because I have got more... *knowledge* (author's emphasis)... it is there to get better sales, the old-fashioned that used to be, you used these methods with the clean, pure fruit taste, pure vegetable flavour and such. It

would compensate for the price on the jar, so to say. (Skåne Producer, November 2011).

Well put: the knowledge and thus cultural capital gained through exchange compensates and justifies for the price on the jar of marmalade.

## 4.2 A New Food Economy

The increasing intertwinement of “culture” and “economy” is a focal point in both cultural studies and economics during recent years (duGay & Pryke (2002), Pine & Gilmore (1993), Lash & Urry (2002)). The framework of a “New Economy” based on cultural values with labels such as Experience Economy or Dream Society has been launched during the last decades. I will discuss some of the major writings in order to define their usefulness for understanding an emerging “New Food Economy” with cultural production of added value as a common denominator. Firstly, the definition of New Economy in use here is reference to the increasing intertwinement of symbolic cultural messages and economic processes, the desired outcome of which is economic gain. The use of symbolic cultural messages is a key element in the New Economy, as it involves the responsibility for consumers to develop skills in ‘reading’ cultural values and, as Lash & Urry (2002) and duGay & Pryke (2002) point out, brings in references to the New Economy as being an ‘economy of signs’. DuGay & Pryke’s argument also outlines that there are an increasing number of goods and services that can be regarded as ‘cultural’ goods. Their use of ‘cultural’ goods refers to the inscription of meanings and associations to elicit consumer desire for their purchase - exactly what our cooks are trying to achieve - but from this view it is unclear if food is part of the basket of ‘cultural’ goods in the New Economy. They further describe that:

There is a growing aestheticization or ‘fashioning’ of seemingly banal products whereby they are marketed to consumers in terms of particular clusters of meaning, often linked to ‘lifestyles’ and this is taken as an indication of the importance of ‘culture’ to the production and circulation of a multitude of goods and services (as quoted in duGay & Prkye, 2002, p. 7)

The inclusion of ‘banality’ would seem to infer that food is indeed inclusive; as Jönsson (2005) outlines in his discussion of milk, he demonstrates an obvious connection in the

New Economy due to rapid development pace and inclusion of cultural messages in added value products in the dairy counter. While the mention of rapid development would seem to indicate there is something *new* happening with the ‘fashioning’ of meanings embedded in (banal) food products in the New Economy, Jönsson continues that this may not necessarily be the case. As he outlines, “the production of such “value-added products” can be seen as a part of a general conversion (to the New Economy), but it is suggested that it can just as well be that the economy is increasingly bent on trying to capture experiences that have always been conveyed via food” (2005). In other words, the meanings inscribed in value added food are an amplification of information that is already known, and communicated via experiences, bringing in an inclusion to the ‘Experience Economy’ as well. A concept discussed by Pine & Gilmore in 1993, they outline the construction of experience ‘spaces’ as key in the eliciting of emotion for economic gain. In this world, no one sells mere commodities ... they sell ‘lifestyles’. That the spaces Producers develop to sell their products are in part to create emotion further embeds them in the experience economy.

It is here that I position small-scale Producers - within the New and Experience Economies, producing products inscribed with cultural values: but as will be shown, the inscriptions made utilise previously held cultural knowledge. The role of those who create cultural inscriptions is continued by Lash & Urry:

This process, they argue has been accompanied by the increased influence of what are often termed the ‘cultural intermediary occupations’ of advertising, designing and marketing; those practitioners who play a pivotal role in articulating production with consumption by attempting to associate goods and services with particular cultural meanings and to address those values to prospective buyers... these signifying practices in doing business is evident not only in the production, design and marketing of goods and services, but also the internal life of organisations as well (as quoted in duGay & Prkye, 2002, p. 7)

This further embeds the position of cooks as ‘cultural intermediaries’. Another key supporting element of Lash & Urry’s description is the increased importance accorded to signifying practices that create symbolic value in the production of goods and services, such as those of small-scale Producers under investigation here. It also calls into account for the wider food industry to understand that it’s not only the communication messages that are interpreted here: it is the reading of the entire production process.

Accordingly, an investigation of understood cultural values and production processes over time provides foundational information in understanding the context of value adding in the New Economy. To do so, Food Regimes is utilised as a concept to bridge the gap between economy and culture, and to further organise this discussion.

### 4.3 Food Regimes as an Organising Concept

Food Regimes was developed as a concept in 1989 by Harriet Friedmann, a Canadian sociologist of geography and planning, and Phillip McMichael, an American historical sociologist, and is ideally positioned in use here as a framework for addressing the evolution of value adding in the food industry. Due to its multidiscipline approach, it simultaneously addresses changes in the production and consumption of food over time. The theoretical basis is relatively wide, and includes “Wallenstein’s world-systems theory, Marxist/Gramscian accounts of the social world, and Polanyi’s economic sociology, in which the macro- social context of the world system and capitalism is enacted through the practices of capital and the politics of the nation state” (Smith, Lawrence & Richards, 2010, p. 140). A major criticism of Food Regimes is its focus to Westernised countries, with a wide nation-state and international view of the food industry (Goodman & Watts 1994, as cited in Atkins and Bowler, 2001, p. 35). As its intent in use here is a broad application to illustrate how and why the food industry began value adding to consumer demand, followed by later empirical focus in a Westernised country (Sweden), I use with the caveat that Food Regimes application is limited to these conditions.

Atkins & Bowler’s high-level interpretation of Food Regimes is in alignment for this broad stroke aim, and is thus referenced here. They describe three food regimes, the first of which is pre-1914 where food production was based on international trade of food (namely wheat and meat) from newly colonised African, South American and Australasian regions for the exchange of goods, labour and capital from North American and European markets, which “broke down the prior trading monopolies in the European colonial system and leading to the reconstitution of the world economy as an international economy” (2001, p.25). This regime saw farming develop to a national economic concern and emergent Agri-industrial complex focused to increasing output volumes.

The second food regime, 1947 - 1970s, is “a period characterised by capitalist production methods involving the modernisation and industrialisation of farming” (2001, p. 27) and

the establishment of a global agro-food system to supply mass markets. Atkins & Bowler continue to describe that:

Agri-inputs (chemicals and farm machinery), and food processing instigated an ‘industrialisation’ of agriculture. Capital replaced land and labour as the primary factor of production and almost all food reaching the consumer became subjected to ‘value added’ processing. The result for the farming sector saw a rapid increase in farm size, rural depopulation and fewer people employed on the land (2001, p. 27).

It was during this regime that large food companies (such as Coca-Cola, Heinz, Kellogg, Nabisco, Pepsi and Unilever) encouraged substitution of natural raw materials delivered from third party manufacturers during their value added processes (such as generic sweetener made with high fructose corn syrup) to reduce cost and began turning some food manufacturing to more closely resemble scientific labs. While these practices (or perhaps, the obviousness of it) is on the wane today, it’s noteworthy that at this period in time it was considered an expression of modernity, prosperity, scientific advancement and the forward movement of man following the devastation of the first and second world wars. It is a demonstration that some acts do need to be reviewed in the context in which they occurred. Social acceptance of highly processed ‘plastic’ food was a reflection of desired advancement in this period of time. However, this advancement not only created the desired distance from the past, but also from the origins of our food - the high level of processing, large scale industrialised manufacturing processes and ingredients/additives from multiple sources created considerable mental distance from the farm to fork.

Interestingly, it was not only the food that changed during this regime, but the ways which food was purchased also began to shift. A significant increase of indoor mass Supermarkets store numbers worldwide during the 1950’s saw a shift to the majority of food to be purchased in Supermarkets rather than smaller independent grocers on the high street - one could say these Supermarket environments were as manufactured and artificial as the food that they sold. Supermarket chains brought in about thirty-five per cent of the food-retailing dollar in 1950. By 1960, that market share jumped to seventy per cent (Ganzel, 2007).

The third food regime, in place from the 1980’s to today, identifies with a number of ‘often contradictory structures and processes’ to the principle tendencies of “contradiction between productive forces and consumption trends, and disintegration of national agro-food capitals” (Atkins & Bowler, 2001, p. 26 - 28). It is suggested as an outcome of the “crises of capital

accumulation related to the oil and food crises of the early 1970s” (Friedman, 1989), and the growing power of multinational food corporations. Le Heron (1993) summarises the structures and processes driving the change to and continuing the third food regime under five headings: an increase in global trading of food; consolidation of capital in food manufacturing; new biotechnologies; declining farm subsidies (diversification); and consumer fragmentation and dietary change. It also saw the increased attention paid to global issues of food security, sustainability, health, and food ethics.

To look firstly at the global trading of food, McMichael (1992) and Burch & Lawrence (2009) suggest finance capital and the activities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) as key to the emergence of global regulatory structures that allow large multinational companies operate. Burch & Lawrence (2009) pay particular reference that the mass agriculture of foods is possible only thanks to the structures of financial capital and the WTO, which made it possible for Brazil, Thailand, Chile, Kenya and Mexico to transform into lower cost fresh food production centres for developed nations.

Consolidation of capital refers to the consolidation of corporate power within multinational companies, gained through mergers and acquisition and business diversification, supported by regulatory framework provided by the WTO. For example, today 75 - 90 per cent of the global grain trade is controlled by four companies - ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus (Lawrence, 2011). As Lawrence outlines in reference to the power of these companies on daily life:

By mid-morning snack you will certainly have encountered their products several times already wherever you are in the world, whether it is the corn in your flakes, the wheat in your bread, the orange in your juice, the sugar in your jam, the chocolate on your biscuit, the coffee in your cup. By the end of the day, if you've eaten beef, chicken or pork, consumed anything containing salt, gums, starches, gluten, sweeteners, or fats, or bought a ready meal or a takeaway, they will have shaped your consumption even further.

Biotechnological advances cite advances in genetic engineering of food, with specific mention to grain crops (such as soy beans) and livestock (growth hormones provided to cows to increase milk production) as extreme forms of this trend. Atkins & Bowler note an interesting parallel trend at response to the perceived consumer risk in genetically modified food, mass production and corporate capital power with a move to ‘fresh’ and ‘organic’ fruit and vegetables for a global market. They imply that a “reorientation of basic foods and export crops to a more

important role for the supply of inputs for ‘elite consumption’ (p. 31) is linked to two factors, which lead us into the final structural characteristics of farming diversification and consumer fragmentation and dietary change: the mass agricultural production evident in global trading created a change to ‘green’ production for social elites in developed countries, and the “changing characteristics of the global labour force, which fracturing the demand for food” (p. 31). In using this theoretical lens it is seen that the emergence of small-scale food production at the centre of this study is reliant on global trading of goods, global economic and financial structures, multi-national power and biotechnological advances.

It is toward the latter impact of consumer fragmentation that I now turn my focus - as the major fragmentations within and relevant to this thesis are in direct counter to the highly processed and farm-distant food and food system evident in the second and third food regimes. Atkins and Bowler describe that the initial counter movements saw an emergence of ‘green’ consumerism within social elites in developed countries, served by smaller speciality producers “where food has become an experience... a trend that resonates with the health and environment movements” (Atkins & Bowler 2001, p.31).

Warren Belasco in his work *‘Appetite for Change: How the counterculture took on the food industry 1966 - 1988’* neatly outlines the transition between the end of the second and the start of the third food regimes, with the emergence of an oppositional identity, and creates a deeper understanding of the food industry today. Combined with the broad-stroke of Food Regimes, it introduces in greater detail the emergence of demand for authentic value added food.

Belasco suggests that an emergent radical counter cuisine against mainstream food ways shown in the second food regime began to emerge from 1966:

(But) rather than meriting scorn, their rebellion... raised important questions about our food system and also suggested further alternatives, a countercuisine. A coherent set of dietary beliefs and practices, the countercuisine had three major elements. A consumerist component offered survivalist advice and suggested what to avoid, especially processed ‘plastic’ food. While radical consumerism was largely negative, the second therapeutic component suggested ways to make food more fun - e.g. through the delight of improvisation, craftsmanship, ethnic and regional cooking. Addressing the issues of food production and distribution, the third element was the organic paradigm, which posited a radically decentralised infrastructure consisting of communal farms, cooperative groceries, and hip restaurants (1989, p. 4).

The description of therapeutic element to make food more fun highlights the opposition to the high level of processing, global agriculture and mass food systems in the second food regime - specifically craftsmanship, decentralised infrastructure / distribution - neatly matches with afore-mentioned Skåne Producer descriptions of their food products as ‘authentic’ and supports the use of this theory as still applicable in the food industry today.

Further support that these elements are still in demand today is an appreciation that the decentralised infrastructure Belasco refers also includes Farmers Markets, Farm Shops and specialist stores - all of which are preferred sales channels of Producers in this study. The emergence of the Farmers markets as an alternative food channel became evident during this cross over period between the second and third food regimes. The first Farmers Markets were reported in the US during the 1970’s, with a slow expansion over the subsequent twenty to thirty years - however increasing at a faster rate in more recent years. The market in observation for this thesis has been in operation since 2000. As shown on the chart below, the number of operating Farmers Markets in the US grew by seventeen per cent to 7,175 from 2010 to 2011 alone.

**Number of Operating Farmers Markets, Total US**

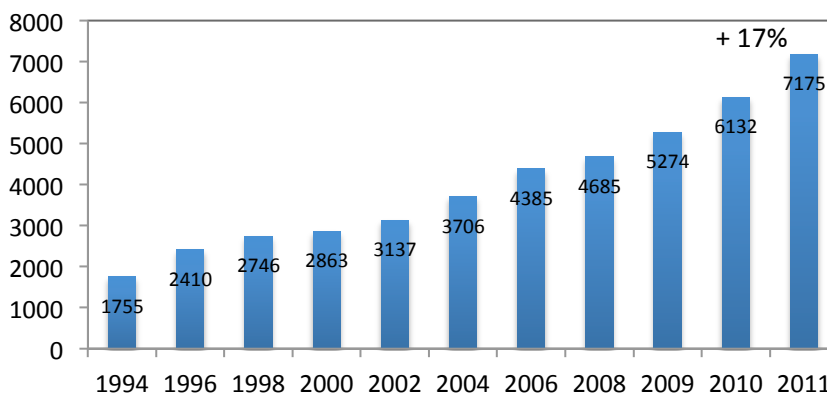


Chart 1.0. Number of Operating Farmers Markets, Total US

Source: United States Department of Agriculture, 2011

The timing of the emergence of Farmer’s Markets, when taken in a food regime perspective locates them almost perfectly with the emergence of the third food regime, in countering the dominance of mass-supermarkets within the retail landscape. Richard Wilk (2012), in his description of the contemporary food movement, also points to the growth of Farmers Markets, local food councils, regional food alliances, school food initiatives, community gardens and orchards, and popular interest in the quality of food over the past five years... and like Belasco,



wonders if these will be exploited as a marketing opportunity or turned into an ideological foundation for change in the food landscape.

This counter also marked the emergence of the consumer as a voice of influence in the food industry, after the focus to internationalisation and mass industrialisation in the first and second regimes. A key point of Belasco’s analysis is his argument that marketers who ‘abused’ the process turned this counter into mainstream belief. To what process does he refer? He describes the way in which marketers turned these beliefs into profitable products was by turning food messages to meet desired consumer lifestyle and identity values, and it was this focus to meeting consumer lifestyle needs that created their voice of influence. In order to communicate to identified values, marketers *repositioned* food added values. Belasco describes a deceptive ‘picking and choosing’ process where ‘good’ elements of products were chosen to anchor repositioning in lifestyle values, and the ‘bad’ elements were ignored or glossed over - for example, carbonated soft drink became ‘low in fat’ to embody consumer desire for a healthier lifestyle (Belasco, 1989, p.212).

The success evident in relevant consumer re-positioning, demonstrated below with organic retail sales - even with potential drawbacks of its use, particularly when deception or excess ‘glossing over’ is involved - has lead to virtually an entire industry shift to how food products are communicated to consumers.

**U.S. retail sales of organic food products increase from 1997 to 2008**

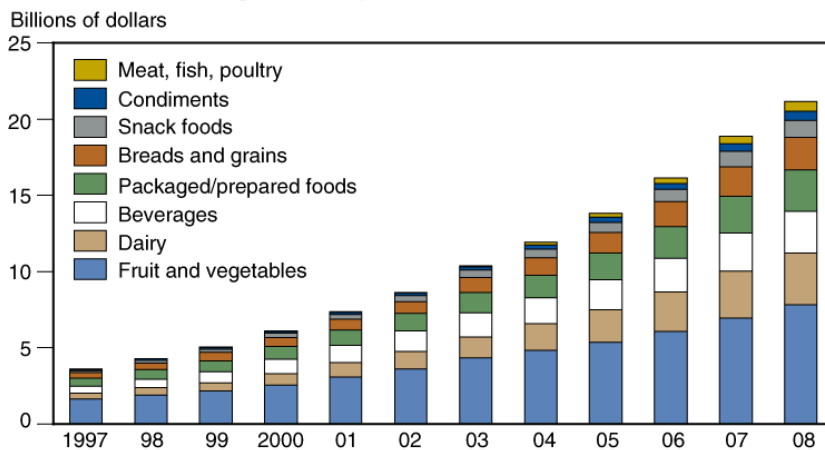


Chart 2.0. Retail Sales Growth of Organic Food Products

Source: Dimitri & Oberholtzer (2009, p. 13)

Products and their messages began to transform from functional communication style into symbolic lifestyle and experience messages - and it is this process of how consumers read these messages that underpins Belasco’s argument in how the counter became mainstream, for without

the culturally held knowledge to 'read' the message conveyed, for instance, using a picture of a tractor on a green field is a farm, is completely lost.

As I will continue to show through the findings chapter, it is the process of developing symbolic representation and cultural construction of small scale Farmers through their production and selling methods that allows a simple understanding and competitive advantage in a confusing food landscape. This occurrence is made all the more interesting in a wider food industry of careful, researched product positioning and communication from larger scale manufacturers: to achieve this, the small scale Producers in this study are unconsciously just doing what they do. The intersection of food regimes, counter trends and Producer unconscious acts at this point in time is neatly summarised in a quote from a Producer participating in this research:

I am a farmer's daughter, and my mother, she cooked jam and juice and all this that we also do, but she was never paid for it, but we are... and that is the difference between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century! (Skåne Producer, November 2011).

## **5. Method and Materials**

### **5.1 Empirical Research**

For this investigation a specific empirical study involving small-scale value-added producers in the Skåne region of Sweden was undertaken. Taking an ethnographic research approach, observation and participant consumer observations were undertaken at a periodic Farmer's Market held in Malmo, Southern Sweden, over six Saturday mornings during 27 August 2011 to 15 October 2011. Ethnographic enquiry in this instance is an ideal method to investigate value adding due to the focus on consumer / producer interactions and the evaluation of signs inscribed in products and material items used in display. As previously mentioned in the introduction, it is also an ideal methodology to 'move the conversation forward' regarding value adding, as common industry methods such as quantitative surveys have apparently failed to provide underlying and unconscious motivations in their subjects of study. This particular market is advertised with an express requirement that all produce for sale there is made and sold by local Skåne small-scale farmers. As such it is an ideal market to begin investigation of producers and also analyse the material representation of space at the market, as each stall was under control of the individual producers themselves. I took notes directly after each of my six visits to the market (it is

difficult to write while standing up in a crowd of people), in a nearby café, with a focus to the salient events from each visit to the market. Each visit on average lasted forty-five minutes to one hour.

With each visit to the market, I entered with a specific item to review. In week one, which was also the first market day of the market season, I met with the organiser of the market for forty-five minutes, gained an introductory discussion (which was recorded and transcribed) and was also introduced to all twenty one stall-holders present on that day, with the organiser advising that they would be seeing a lot of me over the coming weeks. My attention on this day was drawn to the ways in which the organiser perceived the competitive advantage of the Farmer's Market, the type of consumers she believes shops at the market, expectations of the coming weeks' market sales and also the best way to market Producers' product to consumers, (particularly for newcomers to the market, of which there were two). The Producers on this visit were more than happy to talk to me and it was often a challenge not to get drawn into long discussions. This happiness to talk, as I discovered later, required a Swedish speaker to be present with me – as Producers quite often could not understand me in my native English (with broad Australian accent). As I could not – and later, did not want - to locate a Swede for all subsequent visits, much of my later focus at the market was to ethnographic observations only, as I found that my attempted consumer participant discussions were particularly useless due to the crowd at the market, and again, my native English proved problematic.

The second week I entered the market with the specific intention to review the material representation of space – display items outside the products themselves and signage that producers commonly use, and example of which is shown in the photo below:



Figure 1.0, Material Representation at Farmer's Market, Queens Square, Malmö  
Translation: 'Our products come from our own cultivation and without additives'  
Photo by Rebecca Dare, August 2011

The third week, my focus was to body language and behaviour between stallholder and consumer while tasting and/or buying products. On this visit I did have a native Swede with me interpreting conversations – however with their translation, then mine to paper, much of the notes from this meeting ended up reading a little like a movie script, where the most interesting of items from my companion's perspective made it to paper and the mundane was somewhat overlooked. I did not bring a Swede with me to translate on future visits for this reason. Week four was focused to obvious advertising promotional or 'special' deals available at the market. Week five required another review of material representation (a repeat of week two), and the final week was spent looking for details that I may have missed on the previous weeks.

Additional ethnographic observations were made during farm visits, and hour long depth interviews were also conducted with four producers during October and November 2011, in addition to an online questionnaire circulated to farmers in attendance at the market, of which fifteen responded. The online questionnaire, which participants were able to respond anonymously is a recognised departure from ethnographic methods, however was circulated primarily as a way of locating participants for deeper investigation, as previously mentioned I found the market to be often too busy to allow a line of questioning, or producers simply could not converse with me in my native English. However, the understanding of *why* certain questions were answered as they did in the questionnaire revealed again that qualitative methods uncovered much more about Producer value adding practices than straightforward quantitative line of questioning and adds further support for the use of a Cultural Analysis approach in the articulation of meaning. As such, the questionnaire - which focused to areas such as nominating the most important material items in representing their products, and feelings regarding supermarket displays that looked extremely similar to their market stalls – was delivered in Swedish language, as were the depth interviews, where a translator was recruited to attend with me, conduct interviews and transcribe the recordings and translate to English for my analysis. All of the depth interviews were conducted with the use of an interview guide which I had prepared for my interpreter/translator, and while my Swedish is rudimentary, at that time it was at a level where I could follow the conversation and interrupt for further clarification as necessary but, more importantly, allowed me to focus the majority of attention to the subtle emotions the became evident during discussions. What subjects created the most emotion? These subjects became my focus for later analysis. In addition, web ethnography was also undertaken of Producers at market to understand their representations of self and product online, and was also taken into account during analysis and depth interview guide preparation as required.

In addition, my translator was ideal to conduct these interviews – she holds a large amount of knowledge in the Swedish agriculture industry gained from her higher university degree in Organic Farming, and her experience as a consultant and sales person in this field over the last ten years. Our de-brief discussions following each interview reveal much information to me that would have not been immediately apparent had I been working with someone without this background. Handily, she was also able to provide a car as transportation – some of the farms were very difficult to locate, definitely not located near public transportation links and are somewhat hidden in the beautiful Skåne countryside... much time was spent puzzled looking at a map and/or calling the participant for exact directions to their farm.

Of the four depth interviews conducted, three were held on the site of farming production – which usually also housed home, office and Farm Shop where their produce was sold. This gave an opportunity to view participants in the scene of their day-to-day lives, which often involved family... for example, the below photo demonstrating the children to (perhaps) be aspiring farmers, also.



Figure 2.0, Skåne Producer Driveway

Photo by Rebecca Dare, November 2011

## 6. Research Findings

As introduced in ‘Background’, my initial research findings for SFIN have been analysed more deeply with cultural theory to provide a new perspective on the practice of adding value here. Firstly, a thick description of the Farmer’s Market is described to begin the journey into the world of small-scale food production and selling methods in Southern Sweden.

Greetings from farmers at Queens Square!

Food produced in the Skåne earth with much love and consideration!

Malmö's most popular food market!

Now you can shop new harvests directly from the farmer!

(Farmer's Market promotional brochure (2011), originally published in Swedish, author's translation)

I entered the market for the first time on a Saturday morning in late August. The sun was making a welcome entrance during a particularly grey and rainy autumn day in Skåne, Southern Sweden. While the sun is out, the air remains cool, and to the south clouds moving across the Öresund threatens the calm I find at the entrance to a local Farmer's Market held on Drottningstorget (Queens Square) in Malmö. I pull my lightweight jacket closer around me, close my eyes, and I listen. As an Australian living abroad, and as an ethnographer, I am particularly attuned to the differences present in everyday events from my hometown of Melbourne. Generally, I have found the streets of Sweden to be eerily quiet, like a blanket of invisible fog had pressed any non-physical entity into the earth... with my eyes closed to focus attention to smells and sounds, I even find the smell of the air to lack the crisp, dry coastal freshness to which I was accustomed. Today at the farmers market, I find no exception.

I open my eyes to an active market, but quiet, as stall holders go about the business of creating stall displays and preparing tasting plates of their wares, without the yelling, cries of surprise, laughter and jovial competition I had past associated with Farmers' Markets... the action is there, but the sound is not. It is like viewing a scene with the mute button firmly pressed. The absence of sound aside, visually, I find little to no differences in the representation of space at this market compared to the many I have attended in my past. The cues to freshness, to handmade, signals that return the viewer to the farm; appearing are the same characters of wicker baskets, wooden crates, handwritten signs, fresh flowers, and striped awnings overhead. One cannot enter this space and think that anything but the freshest, the tastiest of items will be sold here, regardless if you can find the same representations in the supermarket you'll find located down the road in my old stomping ground – just take a left at the first corner and then go straight for 16,000 kilometres. One stall holder had gone above and beyond in dressing a young boy in a farmer's outfit (denim overalls, striped white and black shirt, straw hat, optional cheeky grin) performing a theatrical show that included his effortless (and silent) play around a stall and the tree standing behind it, presumably to attract custom. I watch him launch into an impressive acrobatic back flip from the

lower branches of the tree and – thankfully! As the cobblestones appear uncompromising to bodily impacts – a perfect landing, just a few feet from where I stood.

Surrounding this performance are approximately twenty stalls arranged in a square, and then a smaller square within this square, which most customers navigated by weaving a criss-cross path in a clockwise fashion, interestedly examining the multitude of displays with products such as marmalades, relishes, cheese, meats and breads. As I also take my haphazard promenade around the market, and review the selection of goods available, it became immediately apparent that Skåne producers selling at this market are engaged in the practice of cooking and ‘value adding’ to the raw ingredients they farmed.

The contrast to a competing outdoors food market I had also shopped in Malmö, located a short distance away in Möllevångstorget, (Möllen Square) was also apparent. There the majority of products sold were imported fruits and vegetables - raw produce - with a strong sense of catering to the local migrant population. The feeling at this market was slightly more chaotic due to the multiple languages being spoken. However, the appearance and display items at the market itself outside the produce being sold - striped awnings, the layout of stock, the use of hand-written signs, even the cars that the stallholders drove - was almost identical. The identical appearance of the markets I found to be a particularly fascinating point, as it reinforced that the cultural construction of what symbolises the ‘return to farm’ is executed in an extremely consistent way.

However, there were differences, the major being that at the market involved in research was the specific Skåne regional provenance, the number of stalls selling produce that had been mediated and transformed in some way (such jams, smallgoods, rapeseed oils, breads, cheeses), and that the stallholders were also the producers of the products that they sold. The alignment of these differences to Johnston & Baumann (2010, p. 70) was particularly interesting. They decoded the elements of Authenticity that consumers demand in high-value food: geographic specificity, simplicity, personal connection, tradition, or ‘ethnic’ connections. They report that from a consumer perspective, a ‘good’ authentic product does not need to have all these elements, perhaps one or two... but a *really* authentic product from a consumer perspective has elements of all five. This market communicated most, if not all of these elements.

As I watched Producers carefully set up their stalls to display their product in a way they deemed the most appealing, and engaged in passionate descriptions about the product they sold with consumers, it became obvious that there was a very close connection they made with their product. Their products were tended with almost maternal care. Jars were carefully and individually placed, labels facing forward... not too cluttered, each jar having a right to stand on its own. Esteemed flavours stood centrally, close to where the stallholder could easily access for

offering tastings and making serving recommendations. It was explained to me that this set up and staging was taken very seriously, with the utmost ‘attention that must be paid to the small details in a display’ – right down to the pattern on a table cloth used to conceal a rickety, aged wooden table. The care and thought placed into the display interestingly revealed a pattern of placing the stallholders themselves as co-stars and leads to the first Producer practice in adding value.

Observing the interaction between consumers and producers at the market, it became evident that exchanges were based not only on direct economic issues such a price. There was much more under discussion underway. What was being discussed, and why? Answering this question leads me to the first finding: Co-creation and Certain Myth.

## 6.1 Co-Creation and Certain Myth

The online questionnaire circulated to locate participants for this research included a question that asked: ‘of your current distribution channels, which do you prefer? Please select one from below’. The majority of respondents (66.6%) indicated Farm Shop or Farmers Market.

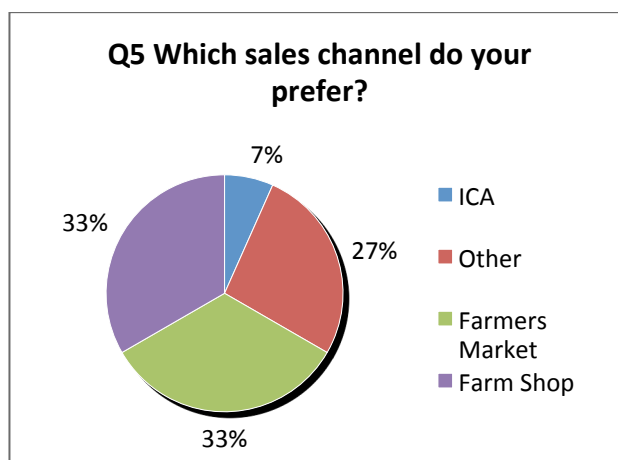


Chart 3.0. Preferred Sales Channel, Producers in Skåne, Sweden

Source: Online Questionnaire, August 2011.

Note: ‘Other’ is predominately ‘Restaurants’

This piece of information on its own is a little bit ‘nice to know’ as it fits with the preferred channels of the counter movement outlined previously. When asked about why Farmers Market or Farm Shop is preferred, most participants indicated it was personal selling and consumer contact that they like the most about these channels. There was a consensus that selling in this way



was intensive work, but it was ‘worth it’ - there was significant return for labour. Which begs the question: What is it that they are getting in return? Is it purely economic gain?

Evident from the exchanges I observed at the Farmer’s market and discussed in later depth interviews indicated this return contained multiple components. A key component was one of education. Producers and consumers educate *each other* about the meaning infused in the food (consumers commonly rewarded the product for being *hand-made*), new ways of consumption and suggested occasions (try this with blue cheese, perfect for a summer party!) - important in meeting the consumer *and* Producer need in identity building and class positioning through cultural capital. As Producers spoke about their product, they educated consumers about varieties of produce included in the food (i.e.; The tomato used is Roma, best suited for this type of relish), and also, importantly, Producers gained ideas for new product development through suggestions from consumers. The drawing of new and products into the discussion may at first seem a little offensive, but my later discussions with Producers revealed that this type of communication is invaluable information for new product generation and development, and has been credited with sparking ideas for product and also material displays of space. Two examples of this involved a recent award-winning product with the unusual inclusion of a savoury, exotic spice to a sweet condiment – tapping into an emergent consumer trend for food exoticism. The second example regarded the co-creation of one producer’s use of the ubiquitous ‘chalkboard’ sign:

When I started, I wrote by hand (the signage) and I do not know how many times I bowed and curtsied for customers and apologised, how it was awful and all of that. And then a lady comes and she says to me like this: ‘But, it is proof it is handmade’. Huh! (*Laughs*) ... Sigh! It was, of course! (Skåne Food Producer, November 2011).

It was also revealed during depth interviews that disagreements with consumers may occur (usually regarding their ‘confusion’ or as one Producer referred ‘blasé and spoilt’, when talking of one discussion over the use of plastic wrapping around a herb plant, the consumer thought this meant it was not grown at site and objected to its use), however Producer position was always made in reference to their relation as the solution to confusion rather than the cause of it. It was also revealed that Producers rarely discuss new product ideas with other producers, as ‘the market in small in Sweden - you have to learn to stand on your own’, indicating that there are limits to the farming community in Skåne. Exceptions to this were evident, however only when a philosophical connection and strong friendship had been formed over a number of years.

These exchanges with consumers are very much a two-way communications process, and, to reference to Prahalad & Ramasway, an exchange “between the firm (Producer) and the consumer (in) becoming the locus of value creation and value extraction” (2004, p. 6) and is an invitational act of co-creation. The co-creation is the centre of value extraction and knowledge for Producers to build their producer offer and the way they sell their product, and as such is held at a high level of importance.

While Prahalad & Ramasway’s (2004) investigation examples primarily involve larger corporations, such as car manufacturing giant General Motors – what stuck with the discourse with consumers was that small-scale Producers are routinely in a position that larger business pay large amounts of research money for... in direct contact with individual consumers who are eagerly sampling their products, freely offering feedback, sharing tips from other sources, with the added bonus that the consumer is speaking with a person that has a level of influence within the business structure to initiate change. Small-scale producers are very close to the consumer via their preferred distribution methods, and in a position where they can respond relatively quickly to changing consumer demand. However, as Prahalad & Ramasway articulate, this is achieved not by only just ‘showing up’ at the Farmer’s Market or opening a Farm Shop. To do so, Producers must invite feedback. Do they? If so, how?

Exploring the practices that Producers engage to begin the co-creation process at market started to tease out more information. My approach to addressing this question firstly lay not by observing Producers that appeared to be engaging in a co-creation with consumers, but by observing Producers that were *not*. There were two stalls at the market during fieldwork, both of which consistently had uncrowded stalls while the remainder of the market teemed with activity (one sold shiitake mushrooms, the other corn - pictured below).



Figure 3.0. Corn Stall, Farmers Market, Malmö

Photo by Rebecca Dare, September 2011.

There were two common denominators between these stalls: 1. Their product offer was not immediately apparent it was 'value added' and 2. Their stalls featured little to no elaboration in their stall displays – no or very limited signage, no extra items to add visual appeal, and symbolically represent a return to the farm / authenticity such as the previously mentioned flower arrangements or wooden crates. There was no elaboration in the space to communicate their values, which as discussed earlier, are important in the social construction of authenticity.

The absence of continuous consumer - Producer dialogue at these stalls would seem to indicate that consumer feedback and discourse is in support of Prahalad & Ramasaway's theory in that it is *invitational*. This occurrence implies that there is prerequisites involved the staging of experience in order to co-create with consumers. The invitation extended by a Producer must materially demonstrate their authenticity by the use of symbolically loaded material objects, and further offer an experience such as tasting plates (or playful boy-farmers) before consumers will engage in discourse. It would also seem to indicate that non-value added products are perhaps not necessarily seen as something in which to discuss in greater detail than necessary to complete a financial transaction - again bringing to mind Levi Strauss with his cooking as a mark of culture.

The symbolic meaning communicated by the material display items in use, is a key point here. As the symbolic loading in these items is culturally held, unconscious knowledge, further analysis is required. After all, the person that builds the displays first imagined it in their mind - perhaps they didn't realise how those images got there. The displays heavily utilise cues for 'authenticity', and for discussion of this I'll elaborate on what I am calling the Farmer 'myth' utilising Barthes.

One of Barthes "lasting contributions... was the identification and interpretation of certain 'mythologies' that he drew from everyday life in France" (as quoted in Atkins & Bowler, 2001, p.6). Barthes utilises semiology as a tool to understand the basis for myth creation, and relates the expression of myths as inherent in food. As Barthes stated: "for who would claim in France that wine is only wine?" (1997, p.20) relating wine as a symbol *of* France and to the myth of what it means to be 'French'. Likewise, in the current food regime of counter-values to mass industrialisation, the myth of a farming is utilised in small-scale food production to embody a 'return to the farm' in support of their authenticity.

The Producers are met with a challenge, though: this use of these 'return to farm' signs is not a unique in the food industry today, as Belasco previously outlined in discussion of the emergence of the food counter culture. Most of the items in use here to symbolise the return to farm can also be found represented on numerous food packaging, and in virtually every food distribution channel, including mass supermarkets and speciality stores. Items such as chalkboards,

wooden crates, wicker baskets, striped awnings, are in common use and demonstrated by the examples provided below from images of supermarkets and speciality stores around the world. As we take this short tour, the voiceover in the opening moments of *Food Inc.* (2009), an academy nominated documentary film about the food industry, articulates the myth in these material display items, stating:

The way we eat has changed more in the last fifty years than in the previous 10,000. But the image that is used to sell the food, it is still the imagery of ‘agrarian America’. You go into the supermarket and you see pictures of Farmers. The picket fence, and the silo, the thirties farmhouse, and the green grass... it’s the spinning of this pastoral fantasy (*Food Inc.*, 2009).



Figure 4.0. ‘All Natural, Farm Fresh’ signage in Supermarket

Source: *Food Inc.* (2009) (screen capture from documentary film)



Figure 5.0. Äkta Lanthandel Speciality Food Store, Sweden

Source: Äkta (2011)



Figure 6.0. Gourmet Grocer Eatly, USA

Source: Eatly (2010)



Figure 7.0 Woolworths Supermarket, Australia

Source: Planet Retail (2012)



Figure 8.0 Marks & Spencer Supermarket, United Kingdom

Source: Great Cafés (2011)

But what of our Producers in this, using the same material items, yet successfully inviting co-creation with consumers? With this proliferation of material displays in use in the market today, why are these displays not approached with cynicism, disbelief, or just plain dismissal? Here Baudrillard makes a contribution with the outline of two distinctive features of mythology to be drawn as relevant<sup>2</sup>: “firstly the nostalgia for origins, and secondly the obsession

with authenticity” (1996, p. 76). Baudrillard outlines that the obsession with authenticity is reflected with an obsession with certainty - specifically, certainty as to the origins, date, author and signature of a work, continuing:

The fascination of handicraft derives from having passed through the hands of someone the markers of whose labour are still inscribed thereupon: we are fascinated by what has been created, and is therefore unique, because that moment cannot be reproduced (1996, p. 76).

In co-creation I believe the feature of *certainty in myth* here is a distinct element in invitation: the certainty that in a confusing food landscape and the new economy of signs, where authenticity is hinted at almost every turn, that the Producers *are* farmers. There is certainty created in regards to the origins of the food, as the author and signature to the work, often accompanied by undeniable physical presence. What could be more certain than that? This invitational certainty is in direct contrast to Prahalad & Ramasway’s theory where they propose that ‘trust’ (or certainty) is an outcome of co-creation (2004, p. 13). Here I propose it is a central element in use at the beginning of the co-creation process. It’s the certainty that Producers can truthfully and safely take consumers from myth and into reality.

In the next finding chapter, the displays used at the Farmer’s Market is contrasted to the spaces constructed at Farm Shops - with the consumer on the farm, the invitational space to co-create becomes something else entirely.

## 6.2 Art

When discussing five-year plans, most Producers indicated a desire to increase business through their on-site Farm Shops - all of the depth interviewees had a Farm Shop, and thirteen of the fifteen respondents to the online questionnaire did also. These shops are under their full control, and thus ideal to explore the more permanent environment (compared to the Farmers Market) in which they have constructed to sell their product. All the producers I spoke with in depth interviews referred to a desire to elicit positive emotion from consumers from their Farm Shops, something they felt that large supermarkets could not do<sup>3</sup>.

One Producer spoke about their delight with their shop layout creating happiness, astonishment and surprise emotional reactions from consumers:

In my farm shop I don't stock these types of everyday products (*sold at ICA, a large supermarket chain in Sweden*). No, what I have here has nothing to do with everyday commerce. There is no milk... I do not have those types of products, this is really speciality items... (*My translator interjects: your store can be regarded as a speciality shop, you mean?*)... Yes really! Well actually it can! (*Is surprised at this comparison and appears pleased at this*). I really take it to myself, how I have been thinking when I planned the store. "What should it look like in the shop to make it inviting to the customer, inviting to enter and to have a look?" Often I say... (*Pauses: body language changes, pulling away a little bit - it's like a self reprimand for becoming a little too pleased with oneself, quickly decides on an acceptable rephrase, leans forward again*) ...the customers usually stand in the door and say. "OOOOH what a lot of, AHHHH how nice!" Then they are of course happy, I think! (*Laughing*). Yes indeed! Most of them are perhaps a little astonished and surprised, because they don't expect anything more. (Skåne Food Producer, November 2011).

Arguably this is an effort to create a unique positioning and distance to the dominant food sales channel today (supermarkets), however the exclusion of what is perceived to be everyday products raises some important questions regarding the 'specialness' infused their products and reveals beliefs about the work they do. Why is an everyday food item such as milk not considered 'special', particularly when considering that a number of products for sale in this store could be considered as 'everyday' use items such as jams and mustards? Consideration of the space implies an effort to raise their product above the everyday and into a form of art, and in doing reveals Producer cultural capital and class aspirations.

To communicate their perception to the specialness, non-everyday, uniqueness of their products, Producers reveal a tacit, cultural understanding to their construction of space, and have turned their Farm Shops into spaces resembling Art Galleries. The Producer quoted earlier in this chapter created a large space, beautiful to look at, with a significant amount of non-food items, and set up in a maze of stalls to encourage exploration and discovery. Another Producer housed several buildings, one of which featured a café with soaring cathedral ceilings, artwork on the walls, and with their produce barely visible in - again - a beautifully constructed space. The image below shows a demonstration of the farm shop 'gallery' in action. This Producer gave my translator and me a tour around their newly developed Farm Shop, before commencing on our depth interview.



The farm shop was located in the same building where the produce was ‘cooked’, separate to the main house that was a short distance away, however all cooking space was off limits and invisible to regular custom in the shop, as were all of the cooking spaces in the farm shops I visited as part of this study. The interaction between my translator and producer revealed much about this Producer’s intentions with the space, and is pictured below.



Figure 9.0 My translator in the ‘Art Gallery’ speaking with the ‘Artist’  
Photo by Rebecca Dare, November 2011.

As the tour commenced, there was always a respectable distance kept from the Product in store, to allow the viewer to take the entire scene in. The lighting scheme shined directly on produce, to illuminate its form. The display of goods was uncluttered, so as not to catch a wandering eye’s attention from the main event. While I watched on in ethnographers’ observation, my translator and the Producer spoke (in Swedish) with slightly hushed tones, even though we were the only people in the store. Discussions commenced about why the products on display were chosen - again, for their specialness, and agreements were made about the importance in their reason for being. My translator was the audience and the Producer very much an informative speaker. These actions struck as being very similar to behaviour that would be found in art galleries - here, a discussion was ongoing with an Artist. An artist creates. What are these spaces creating?

The construction of these spaces to resemble art galleries attracts the use of the term ‘Experience Economy’ as introduced in theoretical framework to elaborate and further embeds Producers as active participants in the Experience Economy. The art gallery spaces are carefully staged for consumption and construction - consumption of the producer, consumption of myth, consumption of art...and hopefully for our Producers, what follows is the consumption of authentic ‘special’ food products.



Tom O'Dell & Peter Billing (2010) outline a useful interpretation regarding spaces that are staged for consumption using a theoretical framework that combines the conceptual tools of Arjun Appadurai's (1996) 'scapes' and Henri Lefebvre's (1991) production of space. Herein they have developed an understanding that spaces where experiences are manufactured for consumption can be interpreted as "places in which the global and the local are entwined and where power relations played out, political interests are material interests are materialised, cultural identities are contested and dreams are redefined" (O'Dell & Billing, 2010, p.18). The building of producer's identity through practice is a key function of the space created. The environment feels very much staged for artistic expression and exploration... a space has been created that Pine & Gilmore (1993) could interpret as a carefully staged production to create experiences such as those available at Disney or the Ritz Carlton.

A main criticism of Pine & Gilmore's description of the 'Experience Economy' is that the spaces as provided as examples (such as Disneyland and the Ritz Carlton) are created with the assumption of a passive receptivity – consumers have no hand in creating the space and limited opportunity to personally shape it. However, as is known from the previous research finding, co-creation is a key element to Producer practices and the impact of consumer feedback on the construction of this space cannot be underestimated - regardless if the Producer is conscious of this or not. The inclusion of art indicates a desire for the accumulation of cultural capital in identity construction, not only for Producers, but for their consumers, also. The construction of this space seeks to confirm Producer position within upper 'cultural capital' class, and the investment of time, money and planning into the ongoing operation of their galleries demonstrates a long-term desire to retain this class positioning.

### 6.3 Magic

In order to understand this act in value making, I have taken an approach using theories in magic. Magic, the art of influencing through supernatural means, could infer secret, hidden and disappeared acts in production practices without clarification of its use. Here, magic is described and applied using two references from the social sciences - Sir James George Frazer (Social Anthropology) and Marcel Mauss (Sociology).

In '*The Golden Bough*' first published in 1890, Frazer notes magic generally falls into two categories: the Law of Similarities and the Law of Contact or contagious magic. The former applies to the belief that like produces like - an example used was "the then current belief in among

peasants in the Balkans that swallowing gold could relieve the symptoms of jaundice” (Barnard & Spencer, 1996, p. 341). The Law of Contact or contagious magic was causal idea of things that had once been in contact continued to influence on each other at a distance. In describing themselves in their products, Producers emphasise ‘them’ as integral to the product offer. This introduces a belief that they hold continued influence in and over their product before, during and after consumer purchase, to continue the communication of their authenticity, thus asserting their influence at a distance via magical means. In discussions with Producers, they appeared to be little separation between Producers and their products ... the way their products were referred was often in the same way that you would refer a person. The extension of themselves as represented in their products created a desire for their products to be treated as how they would personally like to be treated. For example, it encouraged a slight concern about selling in delicatessens where there is a perception consumers are particularly discerning and demanding, which means the chance of product rejection (and thus, themselves) is higher. Producers also held a strong resistance to sell in supermarkets where their product could become the ‘little’ with scant consumer attention (a bit like going to a crowded party and standing alone in the corner), or face the potential of having their product abused in store by careless staff.

The Contagious Magic in use by Producers is a practice to infuse a competitive advantage they believe to be what no one else has into their products: themselves. Producers are the magicians in their kitchen, infusing themselves in their products. Two quotes from research summarise this belief in infusion of self very well. One Producer mentioned that their soul must be in the product:

I have nothing to sell if there is no soul in my product... then I find it difficult to justify why the customer should buy my (product), then he can buy another, because what’s unique in mine is that *I* cultivate it. It should be something that no one else has. (Skåne Food Producer, November 2011).

While another in responding to a question I asked in the online questionnaire, which asked: ‘*If your favourite product could talk, what would it say to consumers?*’ The response neatly stating: ‘I am special, unique and wonderful. And you?’

Additional theory to view producer practices using Magic is provided by Mauss in ‘*A General Theory of Magic*’ (2001), which is that of a social phenomenon containing belief and rites. There must be a magician to produce an act of magic, and an audience to believe in this act. Rites are developed to enact and perform the magic. Magic is not a one-time occurrence; magical

performances are repeated patterns of behaviour and when at it's most successful, refer to "those things that society as a whole considers magical" (Mauss, 2001, p. 22). As O'Dell (2010) describes, the inclusion of belief in this theory provides 'special problems' that will be revealed as particularly relevant for this discussion:

Magic is an institution only in the most weak sense, it is a kind of totality of actions and beliefs, poorly defined, poorly organised even as far as those who practice it... It's existence necessitated two different forms of belief that he (Mauss) called a 'will to believe' and 'actual belief' (p. 57)

The problem being, for acts of magic (or influence at distance) to be *not* seen as trickery, they require collective belief by *all* actors involved, with each actor having a role to play. The magician in this act is the Producers and it is here where belief does exist - but it is not without tension. Present and seemingly unwelcome is a level of uncertainty about their own skill and knowledge in their practice, that in conversation betrayed an oscillation between a 'will to believe' and 'actual belief'. This tension was managed by the development of magical rites, and as far as they could possibly manage, a self-imposed 'no-cheating' policy on these rites.

These rites specifically managed the symbolic values they use to describe their products as authentic - themselves in the product made it *hand-made*, *home-made*, *crafted*. The translation to practice is rather literal: to be *home* made, the production practice must be either in their home or in a nearby building as part of their farming complex, never in a removed and distant facility. To be *hand* made, their own hand must be involved in making the product, and they must perceive a level of craftsmanship involved in the transformational cooking process. One Producer described the importance of seeing and inspecting each individual raw main ingredient with his or her *own* eyes. Another Producer describes the importance of the cook (themselves) to be directly involved in the cooking, cooking in low batch volumes and never on a stove that could be considered 'industrial':

I stir the pot myself. I never use a pot that does not sit on the stove. I never cook in volumes that are larger than 25 litres. No, no, no. Not ever.  
(Skåne Food Producer, November 2011).

...And also describes readying themselves psychologically as to not infuse the products with stress, which might negatively taint the flavour:

It is an experience, every day, every batch that is made; you do not always get the same batch or the next batch exactly the same with the same products. It depends on your peace of mind, on how much you put in your measuring cup. It has to do with... well, if you are under stress... all those things matter (to the final product). (Skåne Food Producer, November 2011).

However, these assertions were made at the same time limitations and exceptions were made obvious, and showed clearly the edges between a ‘will to believe’, ‘actual belief’ and deceit. It also showed differences of opinion and poor definition where these edges actually lay between the Producers involved in this study - there was no common approach. Individuals had determined what fit with their magical act. For example, it’s understandably difficult to grow all of the required raw ingredients for a product on the one farm, so while it is important that they farmed the ‘star’ ingredient in their products, it appears that consideration to all origins of the ingredients in use are not considered as heavily - one Producer mentioned popping into the local ICA store whenever an ingredient was needed, and had never checked the provenance of the product bought there for that purpose; while another mentioned checking provenance of all the raw materials they use. Another mentioned the recipe for one product was something they looked up on the Internet, hardly conjuring images of *crafted*, while a different Producer claimed that all recipes they used were the result of experimentation in their home kitchen. Another mentioned that they had employed Polish workers to pick their raw ingredients as a cost saving, and wondered if this were doing the ‘right thing’ in terms of authenticity. In this instance they looked but did not find an exception to the rules of hand and home made, as they were selecting the produce to cook from the yields themselves - but this Producer conveyed feelings of unease and insecurity about their decision. It appeared to be a compromise in their hand made claims.

As these edges are indistinct, blurry, and left to the Producers themselves to navigate, the inclusion of magic rites to infuse themselves in their products brings a host of anxieties in addition to an immense sense of pride. It has also turned their attention to and creates a high level of reliance on consumer approval. The consumer is seen as the ultimate judge of magical efforts, and also aligns with Mauss’s outline of magic as an act that “society considers magical” (2001, p. 23) - everybody has to believe in the act of magic to be true. In this case, consumers are representations of society. When Producers are asked *why* they engaged in the business that they do, this is commonly the first aspect mentioned - it’s a checking of consumer belief in their magic, expressed in a desire to please:

‘(I make this) for the customer to enjoy!’

‘I do this to delight my clients’

‘I can’t sell anything unless the customer is satisfied directly’

The importance of bringing consumer satisfaction - and by extension, belief - through their produce underpins and adds meaning and reinforces *their* belief in their rites of magic. Feedback from consumers is actively gained from Producers when possible, and it is this information that is actively sought and helps guide further practices, as discussed ‘Co-Creation and Certainty of Myth’ finding.

The execution of these magical rites also brings small-scale food production to more closely resemble a creative processes (such as art or fashion) rather than a production process (such as Fordist production methods), and again brings food production to in closer alignment within the New Economy. In order to execute their magical rites, Producers must manage themselves, their lives and their work in a way that optimises their creativity and mood to enact their magical acts, which blurs the line between ‘work’ and ‘play’. Here, Löfgren and Willim (2005) refer to the use of magic as central to emergent people and self-management methods in the New Economy, where the introduction of ‘fun’ has become a central concern.

This management of self is referred to as ‘reflexivity’ by Lash and Urry (2002) and described by McRobbie (2002) “as a form of self disciplining where subjects... are increasingly called upon to inspect themselves and their practices, in the absence of structures of support... reflexivity marks the space of self responsibility, self blame” (p. 522). Producers are highly cognizant in the requirement for individual responsibility in their rites, as I was informed ‘you are held accountable for what you do’. Giddens’ and Becks description of the concept as undertaking self monitoring activities’ (McRobbie 2002, p. 522), is relevant in describing this accountability here and is further articulated by Lash and Urry:

Social agents and increasingly ‘set free’ from heteronomous control or monitoring of social structures in order to be self-monitoring or self-reflexive. This accelerating individualisation process is a process in which agency is set free from structure; a process which, further, it is structural change itself in modernisation that so to speak forces agency to take on powers that heretofore lay in social structures themselves. Hence for example structural change in the economy forces individuals to be freed from the structural rigidity of the Fordist labour process. That is, it is increasingly a pre-requisite... that the

labour force becomes increasingly self-monitoring as well as develops an even greater reflexivity with respect to the rules and resources of the workplace” (2002, p. 5)

In this instance, the use of magic to add symbolic value of Authenticity in their production methods has transferred Producer association away from the Fordist economic labour process, but embedded them more closely with the counter-structure that has developed in resistance to it within the New Food economy. Furthermore, their intense self-monitoring has also developed skills of greater reflexivity with respect to the rules of their workplace that extends across their day to day lives, and creates a unique set of challenges inherent in operating in this way, which is discussed in the Research Finding Summary. As McRobbie describes the fashion industry in London (2002), this may mean holding down additional jobs in order to make ends meet - one Producer I interviewed shovels snow in winter.

#### **6.4 Research Finding Summary**

The summation of research findings here focuses to the collective impact and limitations of described practices in Research Findings. Enacting co-creation and providing certainty of myth, art or magic as isolated and independent practices would not provide the sum value to add authenticity in food - they are intertwined and dependent of each other. It is their combined effect that creates the value-add, and while successfully infusing authenticity in products, also creates tensions and limitations for Producers in this study.

Of central concern, and the driving purpose for revealing first in this thesis, is Producer practice in co-creation. Co-creation is utilised not only to provide support and certainty to the farmer myth, but also acts as a check for consumer (as representations of society) belief in magic, and the construction of spaces that build and reinforce cultural capital and class position. It is valued information that Producers are in a fortunate position with an ability to act on quickly, provides a sense of achievement, short-term business direction, and validation - up to a point. Of immediate consideration is that Producers are not necessarily aware of their dependence in co-creation - perhaps they feel that they are merely engaging in informative and engaging discussions, however the uncovered impact of co-creation on Producer way of being in the world is far reaching, from flavours selected in their food, to the material items and spaces they use to sell their goods, and the way that their products are produced and communicated. All are undertaken with a view to

ultimately gain approval of some kind from consumers, and it is in this seeking of approval that tension becomes evident. There is tension and confusion created when approval is given - which in the current food industry, it is - but no economic benefit seems to appear. Confusion as to why their creation of authenticity has not equalled strong economic growth, for if the consumer approves, surely that means they have succeeded? The position that Producers find themselves is captured in the following quote:

We get feedback, but we don't get any money. It is very unfair rules of the game, when it comes to economics. All of these economic systems, they are not based on the stuff that we do, of course. So I usually say ... we are doing cultural activities, so we should not have the same game rules... but we are forced to live by it (anyway). (Small-scale Producer, Skåne, November 2011)

So they get feedback, but not money. Why not? What was revealed in interviews with Producers is that there exists a lack of understanding to the dynamics of co-creation and what the afore-quoted 'cultural activities' actually are. Producers have an opportunity to more strongly involve themselves in the co-creation of what they have determined as authentic, and begin to bring their hand not only to symbolise hand-made but also to evolve consumer view of authenticity that builds on their (valued) position in the food industry. Instead, Producers replicate knowledge that they and their consumers already know.

Producers also reveal a lack of understanding about what their role of cultural mediators actually means. Their understanding of 'cultural activities' in this instance is a critical one and useful for illustration of this discussion of non-understanding. Like many people I speak with about my study involving 'culture', the immediate assumption here is one that invokes the idea of 'high' culture - art, theatre, literature, design - rather than the analysis of shared patterns of behaviour and belief, the production and interpretation of meaning, class identity and unconscious aesthetic taste as drawn in this thesis.

Taking this interpretation would necessitate a wider cultural understanding of the food market and where the counter cuisine's roots were seeded. In doing, it uncovers a consumer desire to understand more about the food chain and where our food came from - to draw back the curtain hiding food laboratories, how plastic food was really made and the artifice of constructed spaces at the supermarket. It is a desire for transparency and closure - a 'real' return to the farm. That Producers have constructed spaces that resemble Art Galleries is of particular interest when viewed with this perspective. The outcome of these spaces serves to create more distance from food in an

effort to raise it to a level of art. Art can be inaccessible, and intimidating, and implies that this type of production can only be developed by a talented few. It speaks louder of Producer insecurity and desire for class identity than it does about Producer knowledge regarding the dynamics at play that made their position within the food industry, and creates a mental distance to their food products at a site where there could be none.

The emphasis on consumer feedback and co-creation to business practice may also prove a risky strategy in the future as consumer demands change - and consumer demands *will* change. While larger food manufacturers have the resources at disposal to change as consumer demands do, small scale Producers do not. In a recent discussion with a Food Industry veteran who, in their continuous employment as a Food Technologist in the Australian food industry since 1963, described an example of changes in the food industry over time by outlining 'phases' of large-scale manufacturer led demands in direct alignment to Belasco's description of evolution in the food industry. First, came requests to remove MSG (monosodium glutamate), followed by Sodium, GMO's (Genetically Modified), Gluten, and now there is a request for all raw ingredients to be 'natural' - the latter at minimum to legislative requirement for marketing communication messages, anyway. This informant suspects the next evolutions will be addressing animal welfare in production and farming methods, and for the *all* raw materials to be sourced locally - also in alignment with consumer demand for authentic food products and transparency that is evident in the market today. This also potentially opens a wider debate for what constitutes 'local'; a concern that small-scale Producers may need to prepare. Incidentally, the power of Producers' location was rarely mentioned in discussions and therefore not a key topic within the framework set forth here. There existed an understanding that they just happened to be located in Skåne - a lucky coincidence then, that the region is the 'breadbasket of Sweden', producing eighty per cent of Sweden's food supply and also the location of one of the more leading-edge food networks with strong government, educational institution and industry links in Scandinavia, the Skåne Food Innovation Network (SFIN). That they told me 'local' is becoming another 'dirty word' (up there with 'organic' as one Producer phrased it), would also seem to indicate that the perception of 'local' as competitive advantage may be changing, creating room for the next evolution in the food industry to emerge, and possibly at their detriment.

Additionally, the impact of their belief structure to engage magical rites as part of production has meant a limit to the amount that they can produce and thus sell. Magic in can easily disappear if the magician believes he or she is cheating on what is being inscribed - the magician has to believe in their act. From a practical viewpoint, the abiding concern to always produce within the defines and rites home or hand-made, even with the little flexibility in definition allowed,



means a limitation on the volume their production methods can achieve. Their and their consumer's belief in their magic, while being a main source of competitive advantage, also creates tension in practice of authenticity. There is recognition that this is an aspect easy to cheat on, as producers feel (with disbelief) many large manufacturers do. That they themselves felt some of their acts *could* constitute cheating was not confronted as harshly, indicating that along with the fine line between magic and deceit, there are degrees of deceit. There was a common belief that any product processed through any form of mechanisation or assembly line was 'in-authentic', 'not the REAL thing' even if it were packaged and communicated as if it were - again revealing they are unaware it is these deceptive acts (such as the 'low fat' soft drink) that arguably reinforces their competitive advantage in the food industry today. They could be encouraging the continuation of these practices by larger corporations - continuance of deceitful authenticity messages by other food manufacturers would ultimately be to Producer benefit.

Ongoing class positioning requires that the knowledge that Producers hold continue to be valued by consumers; and it is here that the major challenge facing Producers begins to emerge. Jönsson (2012) writes of the 'Disneyfing' of food in a specific Swedish context, where he describes a hybrid model between food and the experience economy, opening a debate regarding the sustainability of practices, particularly when structured on consumer demand - a fact we know is happening due to the importance of customer satisfaction and co-creation engaged in by Producers. His text does raise important questions on engagement in engaging consumers in this way, specifically the ability to keep up with demand for the next 'evolution' in the new food economy, where consumers may 'opt out' of an offer that no longer feels fresh and genuine. This brings in a comparison to the 'wear and tear' written about in the art and fashion design industries by Hemphill & Suk (2009), who emphasise that "the desire to be in fashion (and thus retain cultural capital) - captures a significant aspect of social life, characterized by both the pull of continuity with others and the push of innovation toward the new" (p. 101), and continue by describing a thin 'line' between imitation and innovation puts many in precarious positions, from legally, creatively, social and economic aspects.

This risk is of particular concern given that many Producers in the Skåne region are 'living on the edge' economically, with one Producer stating 'we want to be able to live entirely off this, (but) the way things are right now, it's shaky'. As Jönsson (2011) notes, economic viability of small-scale producers in the Skåne region has been evaluated to be precarious enough to warrant European Union and Swedish Government funding into innovative initiatives to stimulate growth.

Combined, the practices of Producers point to a close alignment with the New and Experience economies, with a blurring of the lines between food, artistry, mythology and

experience. In conducting this way, Producers also implicate and expose themselves to economic risk inherent in the Experience Economy. The nature of this economic risk is described by O'Dell & Billing (2010, p. 32) as *risky economy*. As they remark, “it is all too easy point out the success stories while forgetting the failures hidden in them”. In this instance while there is an apparent ‘success story’ of “inherent rewards for creative labour” (McRobbie 2002, p. 517) associated with small-scale food production, without consideration to the challenges and limitation within, can appear to place small-scale food production at a much more economically robust level than the participants in this study. Producer insecurity about why and what to do with their position as holders of valued cultural knowledge and thus capital, has, in addition to the practices outlined, created a mindset much like McRobbie’s fashion designers: “despite the hardships faced...including the long hours and the difficulties maintaining a cash flow, the luxury they had... was of being able to concentrate on their “own work” ” (2002, p. 524). Producers report to enjoy the process of creation and control over their perceived creative independence that they have in the farm kitchen. Most report that they undertake their enterprises for ‘fun’ and would discontinue if it no longer continued to be so. The inclusion of fun, however, serves to cement and justify their current practices, and to an extent, their economic shakiness.

## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1 Summary

In this thesis, new knowledge regarding the value adding practices to inscribe authenticity in food products is provided. The perspective from small scale farming Producers was taken; where co-creation, myth, art and magic are key practices utilised to value add products with authenticity.

I started with the fact that value adding is a common practice in the food industry, and is increasingly undertaken by inscribing lifestyle and cultural capital messages in food such as health, knowledge and class position. The theoretical understanding in thesis outlined that authenticity is a social construction, and taking the view from Producers in this study, to be characterised with references to handmade, homemade and crafted messages inscribed into their products. These messages are understood via deconstruction of cultural codes, the foundation of which is provided by subconscious culturally held knowledge, that Bourdieu calls *Habitus*. An example of this was demonstrated by the cultural perception of ‘farming’ to constitute a myth

market that the food industry has utilised heavily in marketing communication messages. However, it was the deceptive use of communication messages by large-scale food companies that created consumer uncertainty to the real origins and production processes of mass-produced food, and opened small-scale production an opportunity to provide myth certainty to consumers with their products.

To value add their concept of ‘authenticity’ to products, rites of magic, co-creation, delivery of certain myth, and development of art spaces are undertaken. These practices differentiate and have been developed in counter to the dominant food system in order to create competitive advantage. In doing, Producers reveal culturally constructed beliefs about their relationship to their product, understanding of symbolic meanings in representation of space and their desired identity via cultural capital. It also reveals ignorance to the underlying cultural structure and history of food that has lead to their position in the food industry today.

As pointed out in the application of theory from the New Economy, the entire production process is increasingly taken into account when reading food messages, and it is here that small-scale production finds competitive advantage in the marketplace. Their emergence as a voice to be heard in the food industry was outlined using Food Regimes and Belasco’s counter cuisine, where strong roots to the food counter culture was found. However, Producers’ lack of knowledge about how and why they came to a position of prominence has created uncertainty about their conduct now and into the future. To combat this, Producers have created magical rites and a high level of self-reflexivity in regards to their practices of authenticity, and a heavy reliance on co-creation with their consumers to develop their product range and material representation of space. The design of this space creates a sense of certainty for consumers that they were engaged with farmers and one of its functions is to create an invitational space for discourse. However, in creating spaces and products that the consumer demanded, Producers merely replicate current marketplace dynamics and base their business information only on what information their consumers can tell them - paradoxically, they attempt to surprise consumers with information that the consumers themselves revealed to them. It is here that a key advantage of cultural analysis is shown. With a wide theoretical and historical view, the food industry is outlined and underlying motivations and desires that neither consumers nor producers can articulate is articulated.

This thesis found that, as Producers and cultural mediators, Producers’ own search for identity and meaning is inscribed in their products. In order to invoke the Law of Contact or contagious magic and influence their products at distance, they transform and value add their products by becoming magicians and undertaking rites of magic in their kitchens. These rites, while infusing their products with the desired handmade, homemade and crafted values associated

with authenticity has created limitations to production methods, and also highlights the thin line that can exist between magic and deception. As individuals possessing cultural capital in the form of knowledge, Producers acknowledge and inscribe this power and transform what cannot be reproduced into their products: themselves. In paying very close attention to consumers, Producers have tacitly understood that their products represent a desire for cultural capital and class position, and have in response turned their farm shops into unique, non-everyday, special spaces that resemble art galleries. In doing, they transform themselves from cooks to artists, bring food closer to the Experience Economy, and also reveal and entrench their own understanding of ‘culture’ as high art; as opposed to the everyday. These actions also force a re-consideration of what business these Producers are actually in: these practices point towards a closer alignment to the service and artistic industries than to food.

Regardless, the belief in art, myth and themselves as value added determinants of authenticity has created practices that restrict income flow, with some Producers living on the edge economically. It also potentially creates risk in their business model should their product offer fall out of consumer favour as mysteriously (to them) as it fell in.

## 7.2 Application

In developing applications for this thesis, the key question addressed here is: what to *do* with this new knowledge of co-created myth, art and magic of small-scale production practices?

Firstly, it calls for a view of where business involvement actually lies, and why. In this example, small-scale Producers have combined elements of food and artistic industries as an expression of cultural capital for themselves and their consumers. The ‘blurring’ of industry edges in the New Economy is in itself not necessarily a brand new phenomenon in the food industry as Jönsson (2012) has outlined in *‘The Gastronomic Revolution’*. However, in this context it is evolving the question of *why* Producers are engaged in the business that they are, where more inspiration for application can be found. As Simon Sinek, cultural anthropologist and management and leadership author proposes in *‘Start with Why’* (2009), inspired leaders such as Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King, Orville Wright looked for their why in places based in altruism, common good and social betterment (which he suggests is another construction of authenticity), which in turn motivated and inspired others, and in doing turned their ideas into social movements. In other words, their why is the basis for construction of consumer desire. Sinek suggests that it is the articulation of why as the reason that consumers ultimately buy products or services. A further

description in Sinek's book is in support of a key message in this thesis - that consumers will be unable to tell you what this *why* is. I hold concerns regarding the why Producers in this study have employed, but I can concede it is currently a compelling and motivating proposition for them nonetheless. However, a less individualistic, more collective and cooperative approach within the food industry, to educate and empower themselves and consumers, develop sustainable, kind and ethical business practices, and authentically communicate about how their food is *really* made could be a more compelling and sustainable why than what is currently employed. However, the thrust of this application remains for the wider food industry: using a cultural analytical approach, define what industries your business is involved and describe *why* it's important.

Additionally, it is the certainty that Producers can create through their value adding practices that constitutes part of their competitive advantage. As was discussed in Food Regimes, the wider food industry, and mass production companies in particular, have heavily utilised and communicated the 'return to the farm' and 'farmer' myth. In so doing, they have shown just how powerful mythology is in our culture and how easily it can be communicated in marketing messages. Unfortunately, these messages in past use were often concealing large-scale production methods and laboratories that bear little resemblance to what is commonly perceived as a farm (or farmer). As this concealment was exposed over the years consumer distrust and cynicism crept in. What Producers are able to do in this climate is remain present in their farmhouse kitchens, and their Farm Shops, as consumers to come *to* them, and in doing, start to create a new view for consumers to build their perceptions regarding the myth of farming. The certainty that is created, and ability to begin changing the myth points to an opportunity not only for small-scale Producers to start using a heavier hand for the evolution of this myth, but for the wider food industry in developing certainty in myth-based marketing claims - by initially providing increasing transparency to business practices and building trust.

This knowledge also illustrates the magic in infusing authenticity - where a key element is the audience *belief* in the magical act. To develop rites without an audience means there is no magic; and conversely if you have an audience and there is no belief in these rites, again there is also no magic. There exists a thin line between magic and deceit. Magic is alike to authenticity in this regard: all actors involved have to believe it to be true. It is also a key element that provides competitive advantage, and Producers have selected a positioning that cannot be replicated: themselves. The authenticity in this study is predominately the Producers themselves; they have magically infused their sense of self as unique representations in homemade, hand-made and crafted production methods as part of their product offer. Which leads to ask the question to the wider food industry: What does authenticity mean to your business? Is it believable? Can it be replicated?

A warning arrives in the form of the risk involved when an over-reliance on consumer feedback is evident in the production of practice. Some research methods, such as quantitative surveys, will merely reinforce current modes of behaviour and reveal only what lies at the surface, arguably providing a perfect template for continuation of business as it is today. However, this thesis illustrates that consumer feedback can be too much of a good thing if taken out of a wider cultural context. It is this commentary that I believe can be applied to larger food companies with huge research and development budgets. To build business with a large reliance on this practice is problematic - as mentioned in the Introduction, one cannot simply walk up to a consumer and ask them why they like a certain food product. They can't tell you. Co-creation discussions with consumers reveal more about the widespread consumer ignorance regarding the food industry rather than revealing how they could be surprised and astonished. There is nothing game changing about approaching a consumer in this way - it doesn't challenge the status quo, and will serve only to reinforce what already is. How can one be surprised if they can articulate what constitutes a surprise? A deeper and wider view provided through methods such as cultural analysis theory and ethnology as a method will reveal culturally unconscious held beliefs, the structures that surround society that influence behaviour and uncover what the underlying motivations *really* are in value making and value adding.

### 7.3 Future Research

Future research recommendations pay attention to assisting the development of knowledge of practices identified in this thesis, and in doing proposes a greater involvement and collaboration of actors across the food industry. The examination of value adding by small-scale food Producers in the New and Experience Economies is a relatively new area of study within the social sciences and warrants further attention.

Continuing the development of knowledge in regards to co-creation, a point of interest is made with reference to Douglas Holt (2004). Like Prahalad & Ramasaway, his approach is positioned at the crossroad of marketing, brand management and cultural studies, and in his publication '*How Brands Become Icons*' invokes the use of co-creation (what he terms as 'co-authoring') and mythology as a key to success in branding strategy. However he does not refer to the element of certainty or trust in myth. It appears to be a given fact that this commonly held cultural knowledge can and will be used by larger corporations in their branding and communication strategies, and begs the future study within these cross disciplines from a cultural

analysis perspective as to the importance of certainty (or trust) as required before a marketing or communication messages is developed, particularly when mythology is in use.

The value shown in cultural analysis in this thesis is applicable not only to small-scale Producers in Skåne, Sweden, but other actors in the food chain as well. There is opportunity for mutual involvement and collaboration to the adding of values in food with a greater focus to education and involvement in the construction of consumer desire.

The inclusion of experience and art to food also indicates a need to more fully understand these complementary culture-production industries in this context. To facilitate this discussion, it is further recommended that Producers push past their currently defined limits of their community and involve with industry bodies such as the Skåne Food Innovation Network in their provision of opportunities for collaboration through networks and connections. Education forums with a cultural analysis perspective regarding value adding will help assist those in the manufacturing and production of consumer goods in the food industry understand their position and role as cultural mediators.

In closing, the role of small-scale food Producers is one that can be promoted with their collaboration, and in doing, can help build understanding that they do have a unique position and practices within the food industry. This will provide small-scale Producers with the confidence to further evolve their practices for greater economic return and business stability in the longer term as consumer demands in the food industry continue to evolve.

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## 9. Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of ‘small-scale farming Producers’ lies with European Union (EU) guideline for ‘micro enterprise’. Classification by the EU is defined by those businesses that meet two of the following three criteria and have not failed to do so for at least ten years: fewer than ten employees; balance sheet total below EUR 2 million; turnover below EUR 2 million. See EU (2012).

<sup>2</sup> While Baudrillard uses this example in regards to Antiques specifically, there is also reference to handicrafts in particular, drawing the use of this theory in regards to ‘crafted’ product, which in this discussion includes authentic food.

<sup>3</sup> In the online questionnaire, Producers were asked to nominate the emotion they felt consumers experienced in different sales channels. 80% of participants believe customers feel ‘negative’ emotions such as neutral, bored or confused in Supermarkets.